

John 20:19-31

April 23, '17

“LOCKED IN OR LOCKED OUT?”

I’M ALWAYS BEEN AMAZED AT THE WAY A PARTICULAR THEME THAT WE MAY BE CENTERING ON FOR A PERIOD OF TIME IN THE CHURCH KEEPS POPPING UP AGAIN & AGAIN.

I THINK WE’VE SEEN THAT WITH TWO DIFFERENT ONES OVER THE PAST SEVERAL MONTHS.

THE CALMING, YET CHALLENGING, WORDS OF JESUS “*DO NOT BE AFRAID*” IS A GOOD EXAMPLE.

WE USED IT AS OUR STEWARDSHIP THEME THIS PAST YEAR & IT SEEMS AS THOUGH ITS TIMELINESS & IMPORTANCE KEEPS COMING UP AGAIN & AGAIN.

THERE’S ANOTHER RECENT THEME, THOUGH, THAT HAS PARTICULAR RELEVANCE TO THIS PASSAGE WE’VE JUST READ FROM JOHN’S GOSPEL.

IT WAS THE THEME WITH WHICH WE BEGAN OUR SUNDAY SCHOOL PROGRAM LAST FALL - A FOCUS ON “DOORS” – THE DOORS THAT GOD OPENS IN OUR LIVES & THE WAY WE SO OFTEN HAVE DIFFICULTY WALKING THROUGH THOSE DOORS.

IRONICALLY, ONE OF THE REASONS FOR OUR RELUCTANCE RELATES TO THAT OTHER THEME WE JUST MENTIONED.

OUR FEARS KEEP US FROM WALKING THROUGH THE DIVINELY-PLACED DOORS OF LIFE.

THAT’S REALLY WHAT THIS PASSAGE IS ABOUT, ISN’T IT?

IT’S ABOUT THE DISCIPLES BEING LOCKED INSIDE THE UPPER ROOM – LOCKED INSIDE THEIR FEARS, THEIR DOUBTS, THEIR RELUCTANCE TO STEP OUT IN

**FAITH & BELIEVE THE GOOD NEWS OF THE
RESURRECTION.**

**IN AN EFFORT TO LOCK THEIR ENEMIES OUT,
THEY HAD LOCKED THEMSELVES IN.**

**BUT EVEN THEIR LOCKED DOORS & THEIR
LOCKED HEARTS COULDN'T PREVENT JESUS FROM
STEPPING INTO THAT ROOM & STEPPING BACK INTO
THEIR LIVES.**

**LAST SUNDAY WAS A GLORIOUS DAY IN THE LIFE
OF THE CHURCH.**

**WE HAD A PACKED SANCTUARY, THE CHANCEL
FILLED WITH LILIES, VOICES SINGING LOUDLY &
BOISTEROUSLY OF THE TRIUMPH OF RESURRECTION.**

AND NOW – HERE WE ARE – A WEEK LATER.

***THIS* SUNDAY HAS A DIFFERENT FEEL TO IT,
DOESN'T IT?**

**IT'S LIKE SOMETHING BIG HAPPENED & NOW IT'S
OVER & WE HAVE TO GET BACK TO OUR REGULAR
ROUTINE OF DAY-TO-DAY LIVING.**

**THAT'S WHERE THE DISCIPLES FOUND
THEMSELVES AT THE BEGINNING OF THESE WORDS
WE'VE READ THIS MORNING.**

**THEY WERE HUDDLED TOGETHER IN FEAR FOR
THEIR LIVES.**

**SUDDENLY, JESUS STANDS IN THEIR MIDST &
SAYS, "*PEACE BE WITH YOU.*"**

**IT BEGS THE QUESTION – WHICH WOULD BE
MORE FRIGHTENING – TO THINK YOU MIGHT BE
ACCOSTED BY ENEMIES OF YOUR LEADER WHO WANT
TO EXECUTE *YOU* THE SAME WAY THEY DID *HIM* – OR
TO FIND THAT DEAD LEADER MIRACULOUSLY &**

**INEXPLICABLY STANDING IN FRONT OF YOU IN A
LOCKED ROOM?!**

**I CAN'T HELP BUT THINK THE APPEARANCE OF
JESUS IN THAT ROOM WAS MORE FRIGHTENING FOR
THE DISCIPLES THAN A VISIT FROM ROMAN SOLDIERS
WOULD HAVE BEEN!**

HOW DO YOU EXPLAIN THIS?

HE WAS DEAD.

THEY KNEW HE WAS DEAD.

**OH, SURE, THEY'D BEEN TOLD THAT HE WAS
ALIVE, BUT THEY KNEW BETTER.**

**THEY KNEW THAT DEAD PEOPLE DON'T COME
BACK TO LIFE.**

**THEIR MINDS WOULD SURELY HAVE BEEN FILLED
WITH A THOUSAND QUESTIONS.**

“IS IT REALLY HIM?”

“IS HE REALLY ALIVE OR ARE WE SEEING A GHOST?”

“HOW DID HE GET IN HERE WITH THE DOORS LOCKED & BOLTED?”

THESE WOULD HAVE BEEN LOGICAL QUESTIONS THAT FILLED THEIR MINDS.

BUT I CAN’T HELP BUT WONDER IF THERE WEREN’T OTHER QUESTIONS THEY HAD – QUESTIONS THAT FRIGHTENED THEM EVEN MORE.

“WHAT WILL HE SAY TO ME? WHAT WILL HE THINK OF ME?”

BECAUSE, YOU SEE, IT WASN’T JUST PETER WHO HAD TO BE FRIGHTENED ABOUT THAT.

ALL OF THEM HAD DESERTED HIM.

ALL OF THEM HAD REFUSED TO BELIEVE OR UNDERSTAND HIM WHEN HE TOLD THEM OVER & OVER AGAIN WHAT HIS FATE WOULD BE.

ALL OF THEM HAD BEEN TOO HARD-HEADED & HARD-HEARTED TO BELIEVE HIM WHEN HE TOLD THEM HE WOULD RISE AGAIN.

“NOW THAT IT’S COME TRUE, WHAT WILL HIS ATTITUDE TOWARD ME BE?”

HE DISPELS THEIR FEARS WITH WORDS THAT HE REPEATS THREE TIMES IN THESE VERSES – *“PEACE BE WITH YOU.”*

HE’S THERE – NOT TO CHASTISE THEM – NOT TO SAY *“I TOLD YOU SO”* – NOT TO RIDICULE OR REBUKE THEM – BUT TO ENCOURAGE THEM & CHALLENGE THEM & GIVE THEM A MISSION IN LIFE!

**THIS – WHEN YOU THINK ABOUT IT – IS JOHN’S
PENTECOST STORY.**

**HE SENDS THEM OUT ON A MISSION & THEN THE
PASSAGE SAYS, “*HE BREATHED ON THEM & SAID TO
THEM, ‘RECEIVE THE HOLY SPIRIT...’*”**

**THIS IS THE PENTECOST EVENT RIGHT HERE IN A
LOCKED ROOM ON THE DAY OF THE RESURRECTION!**

**AND YOU SEE, I THINK THERE MAY BE ANOTHER
REASON THAT THE REALITY OF CHRIST’S PRESENCE
IN THEIR MIDST FRIGHTENED THE DISCIPLES.**

**IT MEANT THEY COULDN’T GO BACK TO LIFE AS
IT HAD ALWAYS BEEN BEFORE.**

**THERE HAD TO BE AT LEAST A PASSING THOUGHT
WITHIN EACH ONE OF THEM THAT NOW LIFE COULD
GET BACK TO NORMAL.**

**NOW THEY COULD GO BACK TO THEIR “B.C.” –
*BEFORE CHRIST - LIFE.***

**THEY COULD GO BACK TO THEIR FISHING BOATS
& THEIR TAX BOOTHS & GET ON WITH THE LIFE
THEY’D KNOWN BEFORE THEY’D EVER MET HIM.**

**HE WAS GONE NOW & THE WHOLE VENTURE WAS
OVER.**

**IT IS, INDEED, FRIGHTENING TO THINK OF CHRIST
STANDING IN OUR MIDST & SAYING, “*I’VE GOT A
MISSION FOR YOU TO ACCOMPLISH.*”**

**HE DOESN’T ALLOW US TO GO BACK TO THINGS
AS THEY USED TO BE.**

**BUT HE ALSO TELLS US WE’RE NOT GOING TO
HAVE TO DO IT ALONE.**

**HE BREAKS THROUGH THE LOCKED DOORS OF
OUR LIVES, DISPELS OUR FEARS & BRINGS US THE
PEACE THAT ONLY HE CAN BRING.**

**HE DOESN'T RIDICULE US OR REBUKE US FOR
ANYTHING WE'VE DONE IN THE PAST.**

**HE TELLS US THAT EVEN IN THE HEART OF OUR
FEARS – OUR FEAR OF A DREADED FUTURE OR A
HAUNTING PAST – OUR FEAR OF GRIEF & DEATH –
OUR FEAR OF DISAPPOINTMENT & DISEASE – IN THE
HEART OF IT ALL, HE WILL BE THERE IN OUR MIDST
TO SEE US THROUGH.**

**HE CHALLENGES US WITH A BRAND-NEW FUTURE
THAT STANDS BEFORE US.**

**THAT'S WHAT WE FIND IN THAT LOCKED ROOM
ON THE NIGHT OF THE RESURRECTION.**

BUT THAT ONLY TAKES US THROUGH HALF OF THIS PASSAGE, DOESN'T IT?

“A WEEK LATER,” JOHN SAYS, THE SAME ENCOUNTER TAKES PLACE.

BUT THIS TIME, OF COURSE, IT'S DIFFERENT.

IT'S DIFFERENT BECAUSE SOMEONE IS PRESENT THE NEXT TIME WHO WASN'T THERE THE PREVIOUS WEEK.

WITH ALL DUE RESPECT TO ALL 13 MEN OF OUR CONGREGATION WHO PORTRAYED JESUS & THE DISCIPLES ON MAUNDY THURSDAY, I HAVE TO TELL YOU – COREY FRITZ WAS MY FAVORITE – PRIMARILY BECAUSE HE WAS THE ONE PORTRAYING MY FAVORITE DISCIPLE.

HAVE YOU EVER WONDERED WHAT THOMAS WAS DOING THAT FIRST NIGHT?

**WHY WAS HE THE ONLY ONE WHO MISSED OUT?
TO ME, THOMAS IS ONE OF THE MAIN
CHARACTERS IN JOHN’S GOSPEL.**

**HE SHOWS UP ONLY THREE TIMES, AND YET ALL
THREE TIMES ARE CRUCIAL TO THE GOSPEL.**

**WHEN JESUS DECIDES HE’S GOING TO BETHANY
BECAUSE HIS FRIEND LAZARUS HAS DIED, ALL THE
OTHER DISCIPLES WARN HIM NOT TO DO IT.**

**THEY’RE ALL AFRAID TO GO BECAUSE OF THE
PLOT TO ARREST JESUS.**

**ONLY THOMAS STEPS FORWARD & BOLDLY SAYS,
*“LET US ALSO GO, THAT WE MAY DIE WITH HIM.”***

**AND IN THE UPPER ROOM, WHEN JESUS MAKES
THAT CRYPTIC DECLARATION, *“YOU KNOW THE WAY
THAT I AM GOING,”* ONLY THOMAS SPEAKS UP TO
QUESTION HIM.**

**ALL THE OTHERS – AFRAID OF LOOKING FOOLISH
– APPARENTLY JUST NOD THEIR HEADS AS IF TO SAY,
“OH, YEAH – WE KNOW THE WAY WHERE YOU’RE
GOING.”**

**ONLY THOMAS IS BOLD ENOUGH TO SAY, “WAIT A
MINUTE HERE, JESUS! HOW CAN WE KNOW THE WAY?”**

**IT IS IN RESPONSE TO HIS QUESTION THAT JESUS
GIVES ONE OF THE GREAT STATEMENTS OF THE
BIBLE – ONE OF OUR CHILDREN’S MEMORY WORK
VERSES – “I AM THE WAY & THE TRUTH & THE LIFE. NO
ONE COMES TO THE FATHER, BUT THROUGH ME.”**

**WITHOUT THE BOLDNESS & HONESTY OF
THOMAS, WE WOULDN’T HAVE THOSE WONDERFUL
WORDS OF CHRIST.**

**AND NOW, THOMAS TAKES CENTER STAGE ONCE
AGAIN IN JOHN’S GOSPEL.**

**HE WASN'T THERE THAT FIRST NIGHT & HE
EXPRESSES LOGICAL & NATURAL SKEPTICISM.**

**THE QUESTION REMAINS, THOUGH – WHY WASN'T
HE THERE?**

**THE OTHER DISCIPLES LOCKED THEMSELVES UP
BECAUSE THEY WERE AFRAID.**

**DOES THIS IMPLY THAT THOMAS *WASN'T*?
WAS THOMAS, PERHAPS, THE ONLY ONE OUT
THERE LOOKING FOR ANSWERS – RISKING HIS LIFE
TO DISCOVER THE TRUTH ABOUT JESUS?**

**OR WAS IT PERHAPS SOMETHING A BIT MORE
PEDESTRIAN?**

**HAD THOMAS KNOWN THEY'D BE HOLED UP IN
FEAR FOR A LONG TIME & GONE OUT FOR BREAD,
MILK & CHEESE WHEN JESUS SHOWED UP?**

“NAW, YOU'RE KIDDIN' ME?! AND I MISSED HIM?!”

WE JUST DON'T KNOW WHY THOMAS WASN'T THERE THAT FIRST NIGHT.

BUT A WEEK LATER, HE WAS THERE & HERE'S WHERE JOHN'S GOSPEL ENDS.

LAST WEEK, WE TALKED ABOUT MARK'S STRANGE ENDING.

IN JOHN'S GOSPEL, EVEN THOUGH THERE'S ANOTHER CHAPTER IN OUR BIBLES, THE MOST LIKELY ORIGINAL ENDING IS HERE – HERE AT THE CONCLUSION OF CHAPTER 20.

SO, IN ESSENCE, THE WORDS WE'VE READ THIS MORNING ARE HOW JOHN ENDED HIS GOSPEL.

AND IT'S THOMAS WHO ENDS IT.

JOHN BEGAN HIS GOSPEL WITH ANOTHER ONE OF OUR CHILDREN'S MEMORY VERSES - *"IN THE*

***BEGINNING WAS THE WORD & THE WORD WAS WITH
GOD & THE WORD WAS GOD.”***

**FROM THOSE UNFORGETTABLE OPENING WORDS,
JOHN TAKES US THROUGH THE STORY –INTRODUCING
US TO ALL SORTS OF CHARACTERS & SITUATIONS.**

**AND NOW, IN CHAPTER 20, HE COMES BACK TO
THE VERY BEGINNING.**

**HE TOLD US, IN THOSE OPENING VERSES, THAT
JESUS WAS GOD.**

BUT WHAT DOES THAT LOOK LIKE?

WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

**AND OFF HE GOES – THROUGH GALILEE &
SAMARIA & INTO JERUSALEM – MOMENTS OF GLORY
& MOMENTS OF AGONY UNTIL THEY ALL COME
TOGETHER AT THE CROSS.**

AND NOW, A WEEK LATER –

IT IS THOMAS –

**THOMAS WHO DARED TO GO TO JERUSALEM TO
DIE WITH HIM –**

**THOMAS WHO ASKS THE QUESTIONS OF JESUS
WE'D ALL LIKE TO ASK –**

**IT'S THOMAS WHO IS THE FIRST ONE IN THE
ENTIRE GOSPEL TO ACKNOWLEDGE THE TRUTH THAT
JOHN HAS BEEN PROCLAIMING THROUGHOUT HIS
ENTIRE GOSPEL WHEN HE SAYS TO JESUS – *“MY LORD
& MY GOD.”***

**JESUS COMES TO US – TODAY – A WEEK LATER – 7
DAYS REMOVED FROM OUR GLORIOUS CELEBRATION
OF THE RESURRECTION - AND SAYS, *“I WAS HERE WITH
YOU LAST WEEK & I'M HERE AGAIN TODAY – AND I'LL
BE HERE NEXT WEEK & THE WEEK AFTER THAT AND
THE WEEK AFTER THAT.***

“IN FACT,” HE SAYS, “I’LL BE WITH YOU ALWAYS – NOT JUST HERE BUT BEHIND ALL THE LOCKED DOORS OF THE ROOMS IN WHICH YOU CONFINE YOURSELF.”

HE SAYS, “I’LL BE THERE – WHEREVER YOU ARE - TO BRING YOU PEACE. I’LL BE THERE TO DISPEL YOUR FEARS. I’LL BE THERE TO ANSWER YOUR DOUBTS.”

DON’T TRY TO LOCK JESUS OUT & DON’T ALLOW YOURSELF TO BE LOCKED IN.

OPEN THE DOOR OF YOUR HEART SO THAT WHEN JESUS STANDS IN YOUR MIDST, YOU’RE READY TO JOIN THOMAS IN OFFERING THAT GREATEST OF ALL DECLARATIONS OF FAITH - “MY LORD & MY GOD!”

AMEN.

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